

SPORTS OF THE OLDEN TIME.

(See Plate.)

THIS splendid plate represents a scene which must have been of the most joyous and exciting character. The sport of falconry or hawking was, during the middle ages, the favourite amusement of princes and nobles; and as ladies could engage in it, it became very prevalent, particularly in France. It is recorded in some of the old chronicles of that period, that one great advantage of falconry was, that queens, duchesses and countesses, were allowed by their husbands to carry the falcon on their wrists without offending propriety. The knight was anxious to pay his court to the ladies, on such occasions, by his attentions to the falcon. He was obliged to fly the bird at the proper moment, to follow her immediately, never to lose sight of her, to encourage her by calls, to take the prey from her, to caress her, to put on the hood, and place her gently on the wrist of her mistress.

The falcon was a bird of the hawk species, about the size of a raven. They were taken from the nest when young, and fed for months with the raw flesh of pigeons and wild birds. They were then taught to rest on posts, &c., in order to inure them to sitting on the hand. To make them tame, they were kept for a long time without sleep, and accustomed to endure a leathern hood, which was drawn over the head. After all this preparatory discipline, (and much more not worth recapitulating,) the hawk was taken to the field, always hooded, so as to see no object but the game, and as soon as the dog had sprung it, the falcon was unhooded and tossed into the air after its prey.

The sport continued in favour until the seventeenth century, but it was gradually superseded by the invention of fire-arms.

In England there is still an hereditary grand falconer, whose office it is to present the king, (or queen,) on the day of coronation, with a cast of falcons. The Duke of St. Albans is the present grand falconer of England. Some attempts have recently been made to revive the sport in that country; but on account of the general inclosure of the fields, and probably, too, because the amusement was incompatible with the present modes of life, the affair was a ridiculous failure.

This sport will never probably be known in our country, except by descriptions and delineations. As in the tournaments, and all the obsolete customs and observances of the chivalric ages, the novelists are the best authorities we can consult for the minutæ of hawking. In their pages we meet with the living and moving pictures of that social life in Europe, when one of the most potent kings* kept an establishment for falcons which cost him forty thousand livres annually, the grand falconer of which had under him "fifteen noblemen and fifty falconers!"

Every reader of Scott must remember the stirring scene in the "Abbott," where the hero Roland first displays his brave spirit in defence of the young falcons he had run such risk to obtain; the violence of his anger because the English falconer had fed the bird with "unwashed meat, and she an eyas!"

* Francis I. He began his reign in the year 1515.

But in one of James's novels—"Mary of Burgundy"—is a description which our plate strikingly illustrates—when the princess, "mounted on a beautiful white horse, adorned with many a goodly trapping, which, though full of fire and life, she managed with that easy and graceful horsemanship

for which she was famous," bearing upon her wrist the falcon, which showed the object of her expedition, and accompanied by ladies (not seen in our picture) and falconers, with their dogs, and other attendants, rode forth to enjoy the sport she so well loved and understood.

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